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ADDRESS TO THE UN COMMITTEE FOR DECOLONISATION

BY LAURIE FERGUSON, MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA,

AUGUST 9, 1990

I HAVE COME TO JOIN THE RANKS OF PETITIONERS WHO, FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, HAVE BEEN APPEALING TO THIS COMMITTEE, AND TO THE WORLD AT LARGE, ON BEHALF OF THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF EAST TIMOR.

THEIR ASPIRATIONS FOR AN INDEPENDENT EXISTENCE WERE CRUELLY DASHED WHEN INDONESIAN FORCES INVADED THE CAPITAL, DILI, FIFTEEN YEARS AGO THIS DECEMBER.

I AM A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, REPRESENTING THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY. I MUST STRESS, HOWEVER, THAT I AM ADDRESSING THIS FORUM IN AN UNOFFICIAL CAPACITY, AND MY VIEWS ARE NOT THOSE OF MY GOVERNMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, CONCERN FOR WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN EAST TIMOR, AND SUPPORT FOR A GENUINE ACT OF SELF-DETERMINATION BY THE TIMORESE PEOPLE IS SHARED BY MANY OF MY COLLEAGUES, INCLUDING MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT.

I WOULD NOTE THAT THE MOST RECENT CONFERENCE OF THE PARTY'S LARGEST STATE BRANCH, NSW, PASSED A UNANIMOUS RESOLUTION URGING ADMITTANCE OF A PORTUGUESE PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION.

WHILST I PERSONALLY FEEL THAT FOREIGN MINISTER GARETH EVAN'S CONTENTION THAT "THE BEST WAY FOR AUSTRALIA TO HELP IS TO WORK WITH THE INDONESIAN AUTHORITIES IN DEVELOPING EAST TIMOR AND RAISING THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE PEOPLE" IS SOMEWHAT MISPLACED, I COMMEND RECENT AID BY AUSTRALIA. THIS SHOULD ENTAIL IMPROVED VETERINARY SERVICES, ERADICATION OF LIVESTOCK DISEASES AND CONSIDERATION OF PROJECTS FOR TRAINING, SANITATION PLANS AND AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT.

AUSTRALIA HAS A REGIONAL, A WORLD, A HUMANITARIAN IMPERATIVE TO INCREASE MONITORING OF THE SITUATION. I NOTE AUSTRALIA'S OFFICIAL POLICY..."DECLARES THAT AUSTRALIA WILL CONTINUE TO RAISE QUESTIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN EAST TIMOR AND SEEK FREE ACCESS FOR THE MEDIA, INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND AID WORKERS".

THE STRUGGLE OF THE TIMORESE AND THEIR SUPPORTERS HAS BEEN A TIRING AND FRUSTRATING ONE. THEY ARE A SMALL PEOPLE UP AGAINST THEIR POPULOUS INDONESIAN CAPTORS. ADDITIONALLY THEY SUFFER FROM INTERNATIONAL APATHY TOWARDS THE PLIGHT OF MINOR NATIONS WHO LACK THE STRATEGIC OR ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE TO ENTICE THE INTEREST OF THE MAJOR POWERS.

HOWEVER, IT IS A STRUGGLE THAT CANNOT SIMPLY BE ABANDONED FOR THE SAKE OF POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY, FOR THE ISSUE AT STAKE, THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION IS CENTRAL, EVEN INDISPENSABLE, TO THE NOTION OF A JUST AND HUMANE INTERNATIONAL ORDER. THIS IS THE SAME ISSUE AUSTRALIAN UNIONISTS, STUDENTS AND MY PARTY ACTED FOR DURING THE NETHERLANDS' EFFORTS TO THWART INDONESIAN INDEPENDENCE.

FORTY FIVE YEARS AGO, WHEN THE UN CHARTER WAS PROCLAIMED, SELF-DETERMINATION WAS EITHER A LUXURY, OR A CONCESSION FROM AN IMPERIAL POWER. ALL THAT HAS CHANGED.

SINCE THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY PASSED RESOLUTION 1514 IN 1960, SELF-DETERMINATION HAS BEEN AN INALIENABLE RIGHT, DEMANDED NOT ONLY BY PEOPLES IN COLONIAL BONDAGE, BUT ALSO FOR THEM BY THE WORLD COMMUNITY. IN THE PAST 25 YEARS, NO FORMER COLONIAL PEOPLE, NO MATTER HOW SMALL IN NUMBER OR HOW UNDEVELOPED THEIR TERRITORY, HAS BEEN DENIED THE RIGHT TO EXERCISE THEIR CHOICE ABOUT THEIR FUTURE.

VIRTUALLY ALL OF THEM HAVE CHOSEN INDEPENDENCE, THE ONLY SURE WAY OF PROTECTING THEIR CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS. THAT IS TO SAY, NONE EXCEPT FOR THE PEOPLE OF EAST TIMOR. WHAT WE ARE APPEALING FOR ON THIS OCCASION IS NOT A SPECIAL STATUS, BUT SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN ACCORDED AS A SACRED RIGHT TO ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAVE ENDURED COLONIAL RULE.

INDONESIA CONTENDS THAT AN ACT OF SELF-DETERMINATION TOOK PLACE IN 1976. THAT IS SIMPLY UNTRUE, AS THE CALL BY BISHOP BELO, EAST TIMOR'S CATHOLIC LEADER, HAS MADE CLEAR IN HIS APPEAL TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS. INDONESIA'S DEFENCE MINISTER, GENERAL BENNY MURDANI, WHO IN FACT PLANNED AND LED THE MILITARY ANNEXATION OF EAST TIMOR IN 1975, HAS ARROGANTLY DISMISSED THAT APPEAL. IN APRIL THIS YEAR, AMONG OTHER THINGS, HE LAID DOWN THE LAW TO HIS TIMORESE LISTENERS: "DON'T DREAM THERE WILL BE A NATION CALLED TIMOR - THERE WON'T BE....".

CERTAINLY MURDANI HAS MANY SUPPORTERS, INCLUDING STATES WHO PLACE HUMAN RIGHTS HIGH ON THEIR FOREIGN POLICY AGENDAS, BASED ON THE ASSERTION THAT INDONESIA WILL NEVER GIVE UP EAST TIMOR. A YEAR OR SO AGO THAT ASSERTION SOUNDED MORE CONVINCING THAN IT DOES TODAY, FOR THE SAME REMARK WAS MADE ABOUT EASTERN EUROPE AND THE BALTIC STATES.

THE POSITION OF THOSE COUNTRIES HAS RADICALLY CHANGED AND WITH THAT CHANGE OUR TOLERANCE OF THE IDEA OF HOLDING NATIONS IN CAPTIVITY HAS ALSO DIMINISHED.

THE RELATED EASING OF SUPERPOWER TENSIONS MUST BE NOTED. IT PROVIDES THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A NEW EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RIGHTS. IT UNDERMINES TOLERANCE OF REPRESSION BASED ON INTERNATIONAL ALIGNMENT.

THE GRANTING OF SELF-DETERMINATION HAS BECOME THE MOST SUCCESSFUL OF THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES TRANSLATED INTO INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW BY THE UNITED NATIONS.

INDEED, THE CASE OF EAST TIMOR STANDS OUT IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE ORDERLY DECOLONISATION PROCESS WHICH IS ARGUABLY THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS, AND THE SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THIS COMMITTEE.

MAY I REMIND THE COMMITTEE THAT THE TRAGEDY OF EAST TIMOR IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE QUESTION OF SELF-DETERMINATION. THE BRUTAL WAY IN WHICH THIS TERRITORY WAS SEIZED, AT THE COST OF MORE THAN 150,000 LIVES, COMPOUNDS THE SERIOUSNESS OF THIS VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS. THE PRECISE LOSS OF LIFE IS NOT KNOWN, BUT LET ME POINT OUT A SOBERING STATISTICAL REVELATION.

IN 1975 EAST TIMOR HAD A POPULATION OF NEARLY 690,000, WHICH WAS GROWING AT A RATE OF ABOUT TWO PERCENT. TODAY IT SHOULD THEREFORE BE MORE THAN 930,000. IN FACT, ACCORDING TO INDONESIAN FIGURES, IT IS LESS THAN 650,000 PEOPLE, AND THIS FIGURE INCLUDES INDONESIANS LIVING IN EAST TIMOR. IN RELATIVE TERMS, THIS IS A LOSS OF POPULATION WITHOUT EQUAL IN WORLD TROUBLE SPOTS SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II.

RECENT REPORTS FROM HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS, INCLUDING "ASIA WATCH" AND "AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL", AS WELL AS FROM OUR OWN TIMORESE SOURCES IN AUSTRALIA, SUGGEST THAT, FOR ALL THE EASING OF MOVEMENT CONTROLS DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY AND THE PARTIAL OPENING UP OF THE TERRITORY, THE TIMORESE ARE STILL VIRTUALLY IN A FORM OF COLONIAL CAPTIVITY.

THE AUTHORITY OF TIMORESE OFFICIALS IS MORE TITULAR THAN REAL. THIS ASSESSMENT BEEN CONFIRMED BY SENIOR INDONESIAN ACADEMICS FROM THE PRESTIGIOUS GADJAH MADA UNIVERSITY IN YOGYAKARTA. ACCORDING TO THEIR REPORT, COMPLETED IN MARCH, EAST TIMOR IS STILL UNDERGOING A WAR ECONOMY, AND IS PERMEATED BY WHAT THEY CALL THE TRAUMA OF INTEGRATION. THE STUDY ALSO REFERS REPEATEDLY TO AN OVERDOSE OF CONTROL BY THE INDONESIAN ARMED FORCES AND EXCESSES IN THE FORM OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY THE SECURITY APPARATUS AND CALLS FOR AN IMMEDIATE END TO THE PROLONGED WAR CONDITION.

THE STRENGTH OF FRETILIN'S ARMED RESISTANCE MAY HAVE BEEN REDUCED, BUT ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION, CONFIRMED BY THE GADJAH MADA STUDY THE

OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE TIMORESE PEOPLE ARE STRONGLY OPPOSED TO THE OPPRESSIVE INDONESIAN PRESENCE.

THERE IS A SPECIAL CONCERN WITH THE STEADY INFLOW OF TRANS-MIGRANTS AND OTHERS FROM ELSEWHERE IN INDONESIA.

THE PICTURE THAT MEETS THE SCRUTINY OF THOSE WHO CARE TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT THE PRESENT SITUATION IN EAST TIMOR IS OF A PEOPLE LIVING IN COLONIAL CONDITIONS, A SCENARIO THAT IS AN AFFRONT TO THE SPIRIT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER, WHICH CARRIES OBLIGATIONS FOR ALL MEMBERS OF THE WORLD BODY, AS WELL AS A VIOLATION OF THE UN BILL OF RIGHTS.

THE RECENT EVENTS IN EUROPE ARE MANIFESTLY AN UNEQUIVOCAL REJECTION OF THE KIND OF NEO-COLONIALISM THAT PERSISTS IN EAST TIMOR TODAY, AND SERVE TO STRENGTHEN THE LEGITIMACY OF THE CASE WE ARE PRESENTING TO THE DECOLONISATION COMMITTEE.

THOSE EVENTS HAVE ALSO HAD THE EFFECT OF REVIVING THE CONCERN OF AUSTRALIANS FOR THE PLIGHT OF THE TIMORESE PEOPLE, WHO AFTER ALL ARE ONE OF OUR CLOSEST NEIGHBOURS.

THEY HAVE SUFFERED FAR MORE THAN MOST OTHER OPPRESSED MINORITIES, SO HOW CAN WE CONTEMPLATE ACCEPTING THE STATUS QUO, IN EFFECT A BLATANT ACT OF UNPROVOKED ANNEXATION? HOW CAN WE EXPECT THE TIMORESE TO ACCEPT WHAT IS, IN THIS DAY AND AGE, CLEARLY UNACCEPTABLE?

AS FOR THE POSITION OF INDONESIA, WE ARE WELL AWARE THAT THE SEIZURE OF EAST TIMOR WAS FROM THE OUTSET A COVERT OPERATION MOUNTED BY A GROUP OF ABRI GENERALS; IT WAS NOT AN EXPRESSION OF THE WISHES OF THE INDONESIAN PEOPLE, WHO WERE NEITHER CONSULTED NOR INFORMED OF THIS OUTRAGEOUS OPERATION.

WE KNOW THAT THIS OPERATION HAS DISTURBED THE CONSCIENCES OF MANY OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN CONFRONTED WITH THE UGLY TRUTH, AND WE BELIEVE THAT MANY IN INDONESIA WOULD WELCOME WITH RELIEF A JUST SETTLEMENT OF AN AFFAIR WHICH HAS CAST A SHADOW OF SHAME OVER THE REPUBLIC, WHICH THIS YEAR IS CELEBRATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS OWN DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE FROM DUTCH COLONIAL RULE.

WE ARE CONSTANTLY BEING REMINDED OF HOW SMALL IS EAST TIMOR, OF HOW UNDEVELOPED IT WAS WHEN INDONESIAN FORCES CARRIED OUT THEIR INVASION, AND OF THE IMPROVEMENT IN ITS ECONOMY SINCE THAT TIME. BY WORLD STANDARDS ITS POPULATION AND SIZE IS OF COURSE RATHER SMALL, BUT NOT BY THE STANDARD IN

OUR REGION, WHERE THERE ARE NUMEROUS SMALL ISLAND STATES ENJOYING INDEPENDENCE.

IN FACT, WHEN COMPARED WITH THESE SOUTH PACIFIC NATIONS IN OUR OWN NEIGHBOURHOOD, EAST TIMOR IS A SIZEABLE COUNTRY, COMPARABLE TO FIJI, ONE OF THE LARGEST PACIFIC ISLAND STATES AND A SIGNIFICANT PLAYER IN REGIONAL AFFAIRS.

AS FOR THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF INDONESIAN RULE - WHICH ARE FAR FROM CLEAR FOR MOST OF TIMOR'S LARGER ENTERPRISES ARE NOW UNDER INDONESIAN CONTROL - FIFTEEN YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE WOULD HAVE CREATED ITS OWN MOMENTUM. HAD THEY NOT BEEN INVADED, WITH THEIR RICH OFF-SHORE OIL RESOURCES, THE TIMORESE NATION - NUMBERING ABOUT 930,000 PEOPLE - COULD TODAY WELL BE MOVING TOWARDS THE KIND OF PROSPERITY BEING ENJOYED BY SMALL STATES LIKE BRUNEI.

THE TIMOR GAP TREATY RECENTLY ENTERED INTO BY AUSTRALIA AND INDONESIA IS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE REAL POTENTIAL OF THESE RESOURCES. THIS TREATY, HOWEVER, MAKES NO PROVISION FOR THE SHARING OF REVENUE FROM THE EXPLOITATION OF THESE RESOURCES WITH THE TIMORESE PEOPLE.

I DO NOT PROPOSE TO SPECULATE ON WHAT FORM THE FUTURE STATE OF EAST TIMOR MIGHT HAVE. THAT IS A MATTER FOR THE TIMORESE THEMSELVES, AND MIGHT WELL BE OPEN TO NEGOTIATION WITH INDONESIA. WHAT IS NOT NEGOTIABLE, HOWEVER, IS THE RIGHT OF THE TIMORESE THEMSELVES TO MAKE THE CHOICE FREELY, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE UN "DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES" (RES 1514(XV).

THE TIMOR QUESTION PRESENTS THE UNITED NATIONS WITH A VERY SPECIAL CHALLENGE, FOR IT CONCERNS THE RIGHTS OF THE SMALL, THE VULNERABLE AND THE WEAK, WHOSE PROTECTION IS THE SEVEREST TEST OF THE INTEGRITY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM.

I WISH TO CONCLUDE WITH REMARKS DEVELOPING THE INTRODUCTORY POINT OF REV. MOORE.

TODAY, REGARDLESS OF OTHER NATIONS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MIDDLE EAST'S PROBLEMS AND DESPITE THE UNDERSTANDABLE DOUBTS OF ARAB NATIONS, THERE IS A GREAT DEGREE OF INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY OVER SADAAM HUSSEIN'S ACTIONS. HOWEVER, IRAQ'S SEVEREST CRITICS HAVE NOT PREDICTED A FATE FOR THE KUWAITIS AND SAUDIS AS HORRENDOUS AS THAT VISITED UPON THE TIMORESE. INTERNATIONAL ACTION HAS NOT BEEN COMMENSURATE.